

## 7 Ways to Help Your Noise-Sensitive Dog

Does your dog have noise sensitivity? Many pet parents know how thunder or fireworks can lead to anxiety, but often don't realize how these common household noises can also cause pain and fear. Because noise sensitivity almost always gets worse, take action today to help your pet.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- New research suggests that common household noises such as a vacuum or microwave can cause anxiety in dogs, and many pet parents are unaware of their animal's discomfort
- As your dog's guardian, it's important to learn canine body language so that you can quickly assess when your pet is feeling anxious or fearful and take appropriate action
- In some dogs, noise sensitivity is related to a painful condition
- Noise sensitivity in dogs is no laughing matter; left untreated, it almost always gets worse
- It's important to take steps to relieve your dog's noise sensitivity through behavior modification and calming techniques

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 18, 2022.***

A new University of California, Davis study published in *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* suggests that common household noises may be stressful for dogs — and owners may not realize it.<sup>1</sup>

Most pet parents are aware that sudden loud noises, such as the crack of thunder during a rainstorm or fireworks on July 4th, can cause anxiety in dogs, but these latest research results show that everyday household sounds such as a vacuum or microwave can have a similar effect. Interestingly, intermittent high-frequency noises, for example, the "beep" of a smoke alarm with a dying battery, are more likely to trigger anxiety than low-frequency, continuous noises.

*"We know that there are a lot of dogs that have noise sensitivities, but we underestimate their fearfulness to noise we consider normal because many dog owners can't read body language," lead study author Emma Grigg, a research associate and lecturer at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, told Phys.org.<sup>2</sup>*

It's important if you have a dog in the family to be aware of how your pet behaves when she's feeling anxious. Common, easy-to-identify signs of anxiety in dogs include cringing, trembling, or retreating. Less obvious signals that your dog is feeling nervous include panting, lip licking, turning her head away, stiffening her body, turning her ears back, and lowering her head below her shoulders.

## Are You Missing or Dismissing Your Dog's Fear?

For the study, the UC Davis veterinary researchers conducted a survey of 386 dog owners to determine their pets' responses to household sounds; they also evaluated 62 online videos of dog behaviors and human reactions. They observed that owners often underestimated their dogs' level of fear, and in addition, most of the humans in the videos appeared amused rather than concerned by their dogs' fear responses.

*"There is a mismatch between owners' perceptions of the fearfulness and the amount of fearful behavior actually present. Some react with amusement rather than concern," Grigg said. "We hope this study gets people to think about the sources of sound that might be causing their dog stress, so they can take steps to minimize their dog's exposure to it."*

It's important to realize that dogs have a wider range of hearing than we do, and that some noises are potentially painful to their ears, such as very loud or high-frequency sounds.

Once your dog has shown you by his behavior that, for example, the beep of the smoke detector makes him anxious, the kind thing to do is to replace the batteries in your smoke detectors often enough to prevent the beeping. You can find tips on how to help dogs with thunderstorm phobia [here](#) and fireworks anxiety [here](#).

*"Dogs use body language much more than vocalizing and we need to be aware of that," said Grigg. "We feed them, house them, love them and we have a caretaker obligation to respond better to their anxiety."*

## In Some Older Dogs, Noise Sensitivity Can Be Pain-Related

A 2018 study suggests dogs who display fear or anxiety when they hear loud or sudden noises should be assessed for pain by veterinarians.<sup>3</sup> The study authors examined cases of dogs who developed a sensitivity to loud sounds, different pitches, or sudden noises. They found that dogs with musculoskeletal pain developed a greater sensitivity to noise. According to ScienceDaily:

*"The researchers believe that pain, which could be undiagnosed, could be exacerbated when a noise makes the dogs tense up or 'start,' putting extra stress on muscles or joints which are already enflamed, causing further pain.*

*That pain is then associated with a loud or startling noise, leading to a sensitivity to noise and avoidance of situations where they had previously had a bad experience — for example a local park, or a louder room in the house."<sup>4</sup>*

The researchers looked at the veterinary records of 20 dogs diagnosed with noise sensitivity. The dogs were divided into two groups: 10 who had also been diagnosed with musculoskeletal pain (hip dysplasia, arthritis, and focal spondylosis), and 10 control dogs without pain.

All 20 dogs showed noise sensitivity symptoms that included trembling, shaking, and hiding. However, the painful dogs showed an increased level of avoidance of places where they had a bad experience with noise. Sensitivity triggers included fireworks, thunderstorms, airplanes, gunshots, cars, and motorcycles.

The study also revealed that the age of onset of noise sensitivity in the painful dogs was on average about 4 years later than the dogs in the control group. In addition, the dogs with diagnosed pain generalized their noise sensitivity to related environments and avoided other dogs, which didn't happen with the control dogs.

## Why It's so Important to Help Dogs With Noise Sensitivity

A noise phobia in your canine family member is no laughing matter. Left untreated, the condition almost always gets worse. The development of a phobia involves a complex molecular change that isn't well understood, but seems to involve a shift in how an affected dog processes information.

Noise phobia can be inherited, so it's possible for a pup to be predisposed to the condition if dogs in his lineage have displayed overreaction to noise. In fact, the genetic connection is so direct that if one of your dog's parents overreacted to storms or other noises, you can reasonably expect your pet will have a similar response.

An overreaction to loud noises can also predispose your dog to other panic disorders like separation anxiety and behavioral problems. I recommend as a first step in dealing with your dog's noise aversion that you simply observe her during a fearful episode and see what you can do to calm her. Some suggestions:

1. If your dog is crate trained, she may go there voluntarily to self-soothe, or you can lead the way. A blanket draped over the crate may help her relax. However, if she doesn't normally use a crate, or worse, has a fear of crates due to a past bad experience, this isn't the time to use one.

Under no circumstances should a fearful pup be forced into a crate either when she's already anxious, or in anticipation of a panic response to weather or other noises. Your dog will feel trapped, which will make both her phobia and her reaction to it worse.

Alternatively, you can lead her to a quiet room in your home and either leave her alone there to self-soothe (as long as she's not frantic), or stay quietly with her. A silent, still environment can often provide relief.

Some dogs will seek out dark, quiet corners on their own where they can calm themselves, so consider providing yours with a darkened room, a closet floor, or space under a table or desk, preferably away from Wi-Fi routers and other EMFs. The goal is to give her a secure spot that helps her calm herself. If she continues to panic in her quiet space, it isn't what she needs to help her relax.

Put an earthing mat or grounding pad in your dog's safe space. This can be especially helpful during stormy weather.

2. Take your dog for a brisk walk or a game of fetch before and after a stressor occurs to help combat the negative physiologic effects of stress-induced hormones.
3. Play calm, soothing music (e.g., MusicMyPet.com) before a possible stressor occurs. This may both relax your dog and drown out distressing noises.
4. Try putting gentle, continuous pressure on your dog to calm her. If she'll allow it, try leaning gently on or against her without petting or stroking. If this is helping, you'll feel her muscles begin to relax.

If instead she seems to grow more anxious, this isn't a technique that will be helpful for her. If your dog seems

to respond well to pressure applied to her body, there are wraps available (e.g., Thundershirt.com, TTouch anxiety wrap) that many pet parents find very helpful.

5. Try Ttouch, a specific massage technique that can help anxious pets.
6. Eye shades that either block all light or diffuse the light can help some dogs relax during thunderstorms. You can try a basic eye mask intended for humans or a pair of tinted Doggles. You can also try blocking the intensity of the sounds your pet hears. Ear protection for dogs is available from Mutt Muffs.
7. Consult your integrative veterinarian about homeopathic, TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) and Bach Flower Remedies that could be helpful in alleviating your dog's stress. Rescue Remedy is one of many different flower essences that can help calm a tense animal. CBD oil can be very beneficial for these cases, as well.

Calming nutraceuticals and herbs that can be of benefit include holy basil, L-theanine, rhodiola, ashwagandha, GABA, 5-HTP and chamomile. If the stressor persists longer than 72 hours, adding in adrenal supportive glandulars (such as Standard Process Drenamin) can be very beneficial. Consult your vet about which option is right for your pet.

Place a few drops of the essential oil of lavender on a cloth by your dog's favorite hiding place before a stressor occurs, if possible, or diffuse the oil around your house for an overall calming effect.

Also consider an Adaptil collar or diffuser, which contains a dog-appeasing pheromone and is designed to have a calming affect. Using zoopharmacognosy in these situations can be profoundly impactful.

One thing you never, ever want to do with a dog who's afraid of storms or other loud noises, is leave her outdoors while she's anxious or panicked. Dogs regularly run away or seriously injure themselves attempting to escape outdoor enclosures during storms, fireworks displays, and other noisy events.

## Behavior Modification

In addition to learning what calms your dog, it's also critical to work to extinguish the overreaction. Behavior modification techniques such as desensitization, counter-conditioning, or a combination are most often used to help anxiety-related canine conditions.

Desensitization involves exposing your dog to the noises he overreacts to. There are tapes, records, CDs and Internet sites that mimic all sorts of noises, including storms, exploding fireworks, car backfires and even gunshots. This approach works better with dogs in the beginning stages of a phobia, and not so well with dogs suffering from fully entrenched phobias.

Counter-conditioning involves rewarding your dog for not reacting, typically with a food treat that competes with his ability to react to a noise stimulus. If you feel you need help modifying your pet's fear-based behavior, I recommend consulting an animal behaviorist in your area through the **[American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](#)**.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Grigg, E.K. et al. Front. Vet. Sci., 08 November 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Phys.org News, November 10, 2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Frontiers in Veterinary Science, February 13, 2018](#)

<sup>4</sup> [ScienceDaily, March 20, 2018](#)